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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 001517

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SUBJECT: HAITI: TENTATIVE DATE FOR SENATE ELECTIONS, APRIL
19

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 00783

Classified By: DCM Thomas C. Tighe for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

1. (SBU) After over a year of stagnation in election preparations, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) announced that the first round of Senate elections would be held April 19. That date is not final until confirmed by Presidential decree. The latest GOH amended budget commits additional funds to the CEP that fill the gap between donor pledges and the overall cost of the elections. The Prime Minister has assigned the Ministry of Planning to direct GOH management of the elections and coordinate with donors. There is a serious capacity gap in the ability of the CEP to manage this election. It is still not clear whether indirect elections will take place for local government and a Permanent Electoral Council. End summary.

Election Calendars Options

2. (SBU) The electoral calendar as laid out in the 1987 Constitution calls for elections for one-third of the Senate every two years. With the current parliamentary session having begun in 2006, the election for the first third should have been held in time for the senators to take their seats on the second Monday in January 2008. The latest estimates from the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) put the cost of these elections at USD 16.5 million -- a relatively realistic figure that has emerged from lengthy deliberations between the CEP and MINUSTAH.

3. (U) In addition to the Senate elections, the chain of indirect elections outlined in the constitution -- and included in the current CEP's mandate -- is also late. Indirect elections begin at the county council (ASEC) level and culminate with the selection of a permanent electoral council, with positions for various levels of local government and many justice of the peace positions selected along the way. Indirect elections were slated to begin as soon as local and municipal positions were filled through popular elections in late 2006, but the previous CEP never instigated the process. Although the indirect elections are part of the mandate of the current CEP, they have never figured in this CEP's discussions with MINUSTAH and international donors.

President Convenes Election Meeting, Tentative Date Set

¶4. (SBU) President Preval invited the major election players to the National Palace for an election planning meeting October 28. The Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Economy Daniel Dorsainvil, Minister of Planning Jean-Max Bellerive, the SRSB Hedi Annabi, and the main MINUSTAH election planning officials attended. CEP President Frantz Verret gave a PowerPoint presentation on the state of elections preparations that MINUSTAH election officials had prepared for him. The only edit he made to the presentation was that he left out dates MINUSTAH had proposed for the first and second rounds. When Verret finished his presentation, President Preval had only one question: what were the dates. Verret repeated the MINUSTAH dates of April 19 for the first round, June 7 for the second, and the official results announced June 29. Preval agreed, and as he left the room, motioned for the press to enter. Verret repeated the dates to the press.

¶5. (SBU) MINUSTAH Electoral Assistance Chief Marc Plum emphasized to Polcouns October 29 that no election date is final until set by a Presidential decree. Plum said he had proposed to the CEP that the CEP and MINUSTAH immediately begin daily election planning meetings. Verret said this would not be possible, since most CEP counselors were leaving for Greece the next day for an election seminar. Several counselors also planned to be in the U.S. to observe the presidential elections. Plum concluded that no planning meetings would be held before the first or second week of November. He assesses that the CEP and especially its President will not be equal to the task of running this election without considerable outside help.

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Planning Minister May Play a Coordinating Role

¶6. (SBU) GOH-initiated election planning prior to the October 28 meeting spotlighted the gap in election preparations. Minister of Planning and External Cooperation Jean Max Bellerive, in an October 15 meeting with donor country representatives and the CP, urged the latter to quickly develop an electoral calendar, present a final budget and hold regular meetings with donor partners to ensure better communication. He asked donors to clarify the amount of funds available to support elections and identify any conditions assigned to the funding (e.g., purpose, restrictions). Bellerive underscored the provisional nature of the current CEP, and that its mandate does not include elections subsequent to the upcoming elections for one-third of the Senate.

CEP Budget

¶7. (SBU) At the October 15 meeting, CEP Director General Pierre-Louis Opont estimated the budget for the partial Senate elections at USD 16.5 million (an 8.1 percent increase over the CEP's previous budget estimate). The CEP budget document received separately by poloff assumed there are 700,000 new eligible voters for a total of 4.2 million eligible voters. Opont confirmed that the GOH will contribute USD 5.5 million for the cost of the elections.

¶8. (SBU) Estimated donor contributions, which will form a trust fund to be coordinated by the UNDP, include: USD 4 million (Canada); USD 4 million (European Union); USD 3 million (USA); and USD 500,000 (Brazil). (Note: USAID will provide an additional USD 1 million to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems-IFES for CEP capacity building. End note.)

¶9. (SBU) Opont said that the current electoral law's increase in the required number of voting centers to two per communal section means that over 600 new polling stations ('voting

centers') must be set up, creating additional costs. The CEP, in collaboration with MINUSTAH, was already identifying new voting centers and assessing centers previously identified but damaged or destroyed by the August/September flooding. He believed that even with these challenges, an official electoral calendar could be confirmed by mid-December, leading to a mid-April election date.

¶10. (SBU) Opont cited election personnel as another constraint. The CEP had to pay wage arrears to already-trained departmental electoral councils (BEDs) and communal electoral councils (BECs) -- many who went unpaid during the 2005/2006 electoral process. Opont cautioned that if the trained BEDs and BECs do not receive their back wages, it will be difficult to re-recruit them for the upcoming election. Recruiting and training of entirely new personnel would push elections farther into the future. As thousands of residents had likely lost their national identification cards during the August/September flooding, preparation of new cards, although crucial for identification during the election process, would take time.

Donors-CEP: No Agreement Yet

¶11. (SBU) UNDP Representative Anne-Marie Cluckers said the project document for the elections, an MOU setting down modalities and accountability for donor election funding, is currently with the CEP for comment. Minister Bellerive recommended that UNDP ensure the MOU correspond precisely to donor-funded amounts and that it specify program uses. Bellerive recommended to the CEP that the elections budget be finalized and circulated. Bellerive clarified that the MOU would be concluded between the UNDP (as overall donor trust fund manager) and the CEP.

¶12. (SBU) MINUSTAH Electoral Assistance Chief Marc Plum expressed skepticism as to the proposed April date for elections, given the loss of time caused by numerous vacation days in late 2008-early 2009 (including the February Carnival), loss of voting centers damaged in the recent flooding, and questions about how the voting centers would be

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managed. He added that for indirect elections to take place in late 2009, preparations would have to commence in spring 2009, which likely would be impossible given preparations required for April 2009 Senate elections.

Prime Minister Weighs In

¶13. (C) Prime Minister Michel Pierre-Louis convoked CEP President Verret, Ministers of Interior, Planning, and Finance, UN Special Representative to the Secretary General Hedi Annabi, the Office of National Identification (ONI), and the Organization of American States (OAS) to a meeting October 16 to discuss the electoral calendar. (Note: ONI was established in 2005 to reorganize the civil registry and issue national ID cards. OAS provides technical assistance -- through support from Canada -- to ONI in the area of logistical and computer training, technical staff support and specialized equipment and computers. End note.) OAS Elections Advisor Roly Davila (protect), who attended the meeting, told poloff and USAIDoff October 21 that the PM emphasized the Senate elections should be held as soon as possible, printing of election materials should commence without delay, and the CEP must move more quickly, especially since it has GOH and donor funding commitments that cover costs presented in the revised budget.

¶14. (C) Davila said Pierre-Louis questioned ONI on timing of issuance of new and replacement voter ID cards, and questioned CEP on its efforts to recruit BEDs and BECs. The PM also emphasized that the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation would coordinate the electoral process.

¶15. (SBU) While Davila said he was fairly optimistic the OAS, in cooperation with ONI, could replace lost cards, no one knows how many are missing, especially in areas hard-hit by flooding such as Gonaives and Cabaret. He was confident that even though there are thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs), it is feasible to determine where IDPs have settled and then travel to those areas to validate identities.

Comment: Political Will for Elections

¶16. (C) MINUSTAH officials who work closely with the CEP are skeptical of the leadership and management ability of that body. They believe that only Director General Opont has management experience, but that even he will still need extensive technical assistance. The issue of political will remains a question. The Prime Minister wants to get these elections done, and her Minister of Planning taking charge of the process is a good sign. President Preval's commitment to Senate elections has never been strong. He must not only issue the decree confirming the election date, but then stand behind his Prime Minister, Minister of Planning and the CEP as they get down to the details of elections planning and execution.
SANDERSON